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Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Letter dated 22 September 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Positions of Honduras on its international agenda within the framework of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly

Since its establishment in 1945, the United Nations has always been inspired by the great humanist ideas of the peoples of the world, who have sought to establish a reliable system for peace and freedom all over the world. The desire for peace has largely been achieved and cultural, social and economic progress has been made everywhere, although to varying degrees. The United Nations has therefore achieved positive results over the past 60 years, thus strengthening the Organization and reinforcing solidarity among the peoples of the various continents.

Today, with spirit renewed, and faced with the challenges that threaten the very existence of humankind, we are working together with the same conviction and motivation as in San Francisco, seeking to invigorate our Organization, which has become the bastion of our principles, for without those principles, we would stand no chance in the globalized world.

However, the United Nations is small compared with the immensity of the issues it is expected to deal with, and countries must strengthen it by providing the resources it needs to resolve efficiently the issues for which it is responsible in all fields — political, economic, cultural, social and technological.

We are facing many serious problems: extreme poverty affecting more than half the planet; pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria; the increase in wars of ethnic cleansing and genocides; the threat of the use of nuclear force; the depletion of non-renewable resources, especially oil; and the need for firm action to protect the environment. These problems are the most serious of the many difficult issues that we must now squarely face.

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A United Nations that has gradually been transformed into a world government dealing with most of the substantive aspects of the harmonious coexistence of humankind is the ever-cherished dream of most men and women the world over.

Last week's Summit of Heads of State and Government did not fulfil expectations. Its Final Document initiates only limited action in very important areas, but, the process of modernizing, reforming and updating the Organization has undoubtedly permitted greater appreciation of what the United Nations means to everybody, including its opponents. We all recognize the tremendous work it has done and its major importance to today's world and the world of the future.

Nevertheless, some issues requiring urgent attention were postponed in this exercise. The Final Document adopted is not ideal, but it represents one of the best foundations for future work, which must be continuous, and above all constructive, with the participation of all.

With regard to international cooperation for development, if there is a serious desire to reach the goals set out in the Final Document, economic measures could be taken that would lead to improvements in some countries and regions. Otherwise, we would merely have yet another document among those that have appeared since the celebration of the Organization's fiftieth anniversary, when we adopted other documents that have been forgotten.

In the area of cooperation and development, we must recall long-standing problems and again draw attention to trade and tariff barriers, agricultural subsidies and technology transfer and training. If these problems are not seriously addressed it will be almost impossible to eradicate the striking inequalities in development between States and the root causes of rampant poverty in most of our countries.

With regard to the Millennium Development Goals Honduras has launched a project aimed at achieving them, and in that connection, I would like to emphasize the following points:

1. As part of the project entitled "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the local level" a participatory study will be conducted in two groupings of municipalities in the south-western region of Honduras to identify priorities and define the conditions necessary for reaching the Millennium Goals. The study will go beyond a mere survey of needs and includes an in-depth analysis of the areas relating to the Millennium Development Goals, thus generating working methods that can be applied in other regions of Honduras.

2. The project also seeks to create a methodological plan for achieving the Goals at the local level, through the study and strengthening of local capacities, in order to ensure the sustainability of any action undertaken.

3. The three-year project will strengthen local capacity through the empirical and theoretical analysis of the actual situation in order to influence the formulation of public policies, so that practical action can be taken at the local level focusing on the achievement of the Millennium Goals and objectives. The project is funded by the Government of Japan through a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnership fund and is expected to begin at the end of February.

4. UNDP and the Japan International Cooperation Agency welcome the participation in this innovative project of representatives of the government, the

municipalities and civil society, whose contribution and working methods have not only been valuable and useful for the direct participants but have also served as guidelines for similar undertakings in Honduras and the Central American region.

Thematic summary of the national response for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals[1]

Goals 1 and 2: To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day. To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

In Honduras, 64 per cent of households live in of poverty and 45 per cent live in extreme poverty. In order to halve extreme poverty by 2015, the entire economic, social, cultural and political context must be taken into account. It is important to understand this complex context in order to comprehend its various effects on the development of the country and to find a solution to poverty-related problems in all their aspects and, thereby, to ensure sustainable and equitable economic growth involving full participation by the entire population.

A basic step in halving hunger by 2015 is to combat the causes of undernutrition, since more than 36 per cent of children suffer from chronic undernutrition and the trend to date has not been positive; indeed, undernutrition among children has increased in comparison with 1990. Undernutrition has multiple causes, including food insecurity and alimentary customs. This means that it is important to support and strengthen projects and programmes aimed at improving productivity and the use of varied foods in a sustainable manner.

Goal 3: To ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Honduras might be able to attain the goal of ensuring that all children throughout the country can complete a full course of primary schooling. Over the past decade an increase in net enrolment in primary education has been achieved, and in 2001 almost 90 per cent of children were enrolled in primary schools.

Nevertheless, in order to maintain this positive trend current efforts in the sphere of education must be followed up and intensified, coordination among the various actors working to educate the Honduran people must be improved, and policy design must include appropriate strategies that optimize the work done by the government sector, civil society and international cooperators. It is also important to focus efforts on other related issues, such as the quality of education, lack of retention, the high rate of repetition of school years and difficulty of access in remote areas, and so on.

Goal 4: To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education not later than the end of 2015

In Honduras, both girls and boys have access to education and currently, in general, there are more girls than boys in primary school and more young women than young men who are able to read and write. Access to education is not a gender issue in Honduras.

[1] See www.undp.un.hn/indh.

In order to have a better overview of the problem of gender equality in our country, it is necessary to consider the issues of access and the nature of women's participation in all spheres of society: economic, political, social and cultural. Examples of unequal access in these areas include the facts that only 5.5 per cent of members of parliament are women, and that less than 30 per cent of total GDP is distributed directly among women.

It is crucial to promote and strengthen the activities and institutions that encourage the participation of both genders in society and facilitate equal opportunity and the inclusion of all men and women in Honduran society. Education policy must also include a gender focus favouring the participation of women in all spheres on an equal footing.

Goal 5: To reduce under-five child mortality by two thirds between 1990 and 2015

In Honduras, 34 children per thousand die before they are one year old, and 45 per thousand never reach the age of five. Infant mortality is 38 per thousand live births in rural areas, and 29 in urban areas.

Child mortality is closely linked to the mother's educational level and to the area in which she lives (urban or rural). In order to reach the goal of reducing under-five child mortality, activities and policies must focus on risk factors, which means that priority should be given to improving conditions during pregnancy, childbirth the post-partum period and the puerperium. Communication and education strategies must be designed targeting both mothers and fathers in order to encourage appropriate hygiene practices when children are healthy and when they are sick. The capacity of the health services at all levels should be strengthened and food and nutritional security ensured.

Goal 6: To reduce maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015

The maternal mortality rate has been falling over the years. In 1990, out of each 100 thousand births, 182 ended with the mother's death, while in 1997 the corresponding figure was 108. According to projections, it is hoped that Honduras will manage to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. As in the case of child mortality most cases of maternal death (74 per cent) are directly associated with pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium.

Among the challenges and priorities involved in reaching this goal and improving maternal health in general, it is worth mentioning the incorporation of reproductive health into health policies, programmes and projects, the preparation of studies on women's health to identify areas needing priority assistance, the control of unwanted pregnancies through suitable family planning methods, and the raising of awareness among young people with regard to sexuality and reproductive health. Furthermore, attention must be paid to the relationships between maternal health and other aspects of health and well-being in general, such as, undernutrition, child health, and HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Goals 7 and 8: To have, by 2015, halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. To have, by 2015, halted and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

The incidence of infections and diseases is a serious health issue in Honduras. Malaria and dengue are diseases that are difficult to control, and the dimensions of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are expanding daily. The country has the fastest growing rate of reported HIV/AIDS cases in Central America and the fifth fastest rate at the continental level. Between 1985, when the epidemic began, and 2002, the Secretariat of Health registered 18,117 persons living with HIV/AIDS, but bearing in mind that 30 to 50 per cent of cases go unreported, it is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 cases nationwide.

By virtue of the large number of unreported cases, it is of prime importance to improve the recording of HIV/AIDS incidence in order to develop strategies matching the real scope of the situation. Furthermore, it is necessary to take preventive action through the dissemination of appropriate information on HIV/AIDS in general and to improve access to suitable medical care for persons living with HIV/AIDS. There are many actors working on HIV/AIDS, and that work will be strengthened by the agreements and strategies concerning the fight against the epidemic that exists between the different actors in society.

In order to curb the expansion of other serious diseases, information on hygiene and support for all efforts aimed at combating vector-borne diseases remain vital. Goal 8 includes seven specific targets pertaining to the situation in the country with regard to external debt, unemployment, the commercial and financial system, and access to medicines and to channels of communication.

Goal 8 is quite broad and embodies seven specific targets related to the development of an open commercial and financial system, attention to the special needs of the least developed countries, external debt management, unemployment (especially among young people), and access to essential medicines and to the new information and communication technologies.

Reaching those targets will require strong and sustainable cooperation and coordination among all parties involved in development both within each country and at the international level. Cooperation with developed countries is important for the formulation and expansion of strategies based on predictable and non-discriminatory norms that support development in each country with regard to the various aspects of Goal 8.

Among the various actions and policies, emphasis is placed on the importance of confronting, the debt problems of developing countries in a general manner through national and international measures aimed at making the debt sustainable in the long term, of the commitment — by all actors — to achieving proper management of issues and resources, and of the commitment and general determination of the entire population to reduce poverty in a transparent and inclusive manner, in order to attain sustainable development.

Unless serious cooperation measures are taken in such fields as technology transfer, production of generic medicines and the genuine opening up of trade through the elimination of tariff barriers and agricultural subsidies, the Millennium Goals will remain hard to attain. Programmes such as innovative measures for the generation of alternative resources for development might be palliative but will not

permanently eliminate the root causes of the aforementioned problems and, in the long run, will have no positive effect.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a serious economic, political and social issue that affects all countries, but affects the developing countries more acutely and fundamentally. High oil prices are buffeting our countries relentlessly and brutally, like a hurricane, and are ruining all the plans, projects and programmes formulated on the basis of recommendations for achieving the Millennium Goals and other established international commitments.

The oil bill cancels out all the efforts made by these poor peoples and nullifies all international cooperation assistance. High oil prices leave no margin, and countries have to resign themselves to a drastic and substantial decline in their economies, and a real deterioration in the quality of life they have achieved.

The President of the Republic recently made the following comments with respect to the gravity of the oil crisis:

> "Let us not deceive ourselves: adopting laws and constitutional reforms and even short-term institutional building is not enough if we do not become involved in the oil crisis. In Honduras and in many countries of the region, the increase in the oil bill is already twice as large as all the external aid we receive. The situation could get worse if we do not adopt serious measures and reach the necessary agreements in this area".

Given this situation, the General Assembly could recommend to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that they should give priority to studying and solving the oil issue, with special attention to the developing countries. The timely relief of this burden could save those countries from declining into economic chaos.

The scourge of terrorism requires special measures and coordinated international action. We condemn all indiscriminate acts perpetrated against civilians. The conclusion of the work on the convention international terrorism is urgent and necessary.

Honduras remains hopeful that agreements will be reached that will make it possible to establish the human rights council. A high-level panel should conduct a thorough analysis of the structure of the current system and make recommendations for the establishment of the new human rights council.

I wish to conclude by reiterating our commitment to work with the General Assembly in an open and constructive manner. I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter as a document of the sixtieth session of the Assembly, since it contains an assessment of the progress made by Honduras towards the attainment of the Millennium Goals, the ultimate objective of the Summit and of this regular session of the Assembly.

(*Signed*) Manuel **Acosta Bonilla**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative